

Message Text

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ACTION HA-05

INFO OCT-01 EA-10 ISO-00 PM-05 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 L-03
CIAE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 ICA-11 PA-01 IO-13 /081 W
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FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0895

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 SINGAPORE 3673

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SHUM, SN
SUBJECT: SINGAPORE DETAINEE SHAMSUDDIN TUNG

REF: A) SINGAPORE 3514, B) STATE 196655, C) SINGAPORE 0224,
D) SINGAPORE 0276, E) 77 SINGAPORE 3160,
F) 77 SINGAPORE 3087, G) 77 SINGAPORE 0777, H) 76 SINGAPORE
5756, I) 76 SINGAPORE 5724, J) SINGAPORE 0558,
K) SINGAPORE 0950, L) SINGAPORE A-108

1. WE FULLY SHARE THE DEPARTMENT'S DESIRE TO ENCOURAGE THE SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT TO CEASE USING ITS INTERNAL SECURITY ACT (ISA) TO HOLD DETAINEES WITHOUT TRIAL AND EITHER BRING TO TRIAL OR RELEASE THOSE NOW HELD UNDER THE ACT, INCLUDING SHAMSUDDIN TUNG. AS WE HAVE REPORTED, THERE HAS BEEN APPRECIABLE PROGRESS IN THIS DIRECTION OVER THE PAST YEAR. TWO OF THE DOZEN OR SO PROMINENT DETAINEES HAVE BEEN RELEASED IN RECENT MONTHS AND THERE HAVE BEEN OTHER TANGIBLE STEPS AS WELL. PROSPECTS APPEAR GOOD FOR A CONTINUATION OF THIS LIBERALIZING TREND. WE BELIEVE THAT PART OF THE CREDIT FOR THIS DEVELOPMENT CAN BE ATTRIBUTED TO THE QUIET, UNPUBLISHED EFFORTS OF U.S. OFFICIALS SUCH AS ASSISTANT SECRETARY DERIAN'S JANUARY 1978 VISIT TO SINGAPORE. WE FEAR, HOWEVER, THAT THE PROPOSED REPLY BY ASSISTANT SECRETARY DERIAN TO MRS. TUNG'S LETTER (REF B) WOULD BE LESS LIKELY TO ENCOURAGE THIS PROCESS THAN TO HINDER IT. NOR, IN OUR VIEW, WOULD THE

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PROPOSED LETTER HELP TO RESOLVE TUNG'S CASE, BUT MIGHT EVEN TEND TO PROLONG IT.

2. THE DEPARTMENT SHOULD BE FAMILIAR WITH THE SHAMSUDDIN TUNG CASE, ON WHICH WE HAVE REPORTED AT SOME LENGTH OVER THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS. WE HAVE ALSO DISCUSSED THE CASE ON NUMEROUS OCCASIONS WITH SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY DERIAN HERSELF RAISED IT WITH PRIME MINISTER LEE DURING THEIR MEETING IN JANUARY (REF C). AS THE DEPARTMENT WILL RECALL, TUNG WAS EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF THE CHINESE LANGUAGE DAILY NANYANG SIANG PAO. HE WAS DETAINED UNDER THE ISA IN MAY 1971 ON CHARGES OF USING THE PAPER TO AROUSE COMMUNAL EMOTIONS AND CHINESE CHAUVINISM. HE WAS RELEASED IN JANUARY 1973 AFTER ADMITTING THAT HE HAD SOUGHT TO INCITE VIOLENCE AND BLAMING THE PAPER'S OWNER, LEE EU SENG, FOR DIRECTING HIM TO DO SO. HE WAS ARRESTED AGAIN IN DECEMBER 1976 AFTER THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS ON CHARGES ONCE AGAIN OF INCITING CHINESE CHAUVINISM, THIS TIME IN THE COURSE OF THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN.

3. THE SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT IS ON RECORD AS BEING PREPARED TO RELEASE TUNG IF HE RECANTS AND AGREES NOT TO TAKE PART IN PUBLIC ACTIVITIES AGAIN. AS FAR AS WE ARE AWARE, TUNG HAS NOT DONE SO. HE HAS, HOWEVER, BEEN ENGAGED SINCE HIS SECOND DETENTION IN A PUBLIC RELATIONS DUEL WITH THE SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT, UTILIZING OPEN LETTERS, LETTERS TO THE EDITOR, ETC., IN SEEKING RELEASE WITHOUT RESTRICTIONS. MRS. TUNG'S LETTER TO ASSISTANT SECRETARY DERIAN (ONE OF A NUMBER SHE HAS WRITTEN TO VARIOUS ENTITIES) IS EVIDENTLY PART OF THAT CAMPAIGN. WE CAN EXPECT THAT ASSISTANT SECRETARY DERIAN'S RESPONSE WILL BE MADE PUBLIC IF TUNG THINKS IT ADVANTAGEOUS TO DO SO.

4. THE QUESTION ARISES AS TO JUST WHAT CONSTITUTES "CHINESE
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CHAUVINISM" AND WHY IT IS CONSIDERED SO SERIOUS BY THE GOVERNMENT AS TO WARRANT DETENTION WITHOUT TRIAL. SINGAPORE IS A MULTI-RACIAL SOCIETY WITH A LONG HISTORY OF RACIAL TENSION AND VIOLENCE BETWEEN THE ETHNIC CHINESE MAJORITY AND THE MALAY MINORITY. FROM 1946 UNTIL THE LATE 1960S, RACIAL RIOTS AND DISORDERS WERE A REGULARLY RECURRING PROBLEM, CAUSING NUMEROUS CASUALTIES AND ON OCCASION VIRTUALLY PARALYZING THE COUNTRY. SINCE THAT TIME, THE GOVERNMENT HAS MADE AN ALL-OUT EFFORT TO OVERCOME RACISM, HAS ENFORCED RACIAL EQUALITY THROUGHOUT THE SOCIETY, AND HAS TO A CONSIDERABLE EXTENT BROKEN UP THE FORMER SEGREGATED NEIGHBORHOODS WITH ITS MASSIVE PUBLIC HOUSING PROGRAMS. AT PRESENT THE COUNTRY ENJOYS A DEGREE OF RACIAL HARMONY UNIQUE IN MOST OF SOUTHEAST ASIA. IT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED ESSENTIALLY BY PRESSING THE DOMINANT CHINESE MAJORITY TO ACCEPT THE SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL EQUALITY OF THE MALAY MINORITY. ANY ACTION WHICH THREATENS TO REVERSE THIS HARD-WON AND STILL NOT ENTIRELY COMPLETE VICTORY IS SEEN BY THE GOVERNMENT AS A THREAT TO SINGAPORE HARDLY LESS DANGEROUS THAN COMMUNIST SUBVERSION.

5. CHINESE CHAUVINISM ALSO HAS AN IMPORTANT FOREIGN POLICY DIMENSION. THE CULTURAL MAGNETISM OF MAINLAND CHINA IS EX-

TRAORDINARILY STRONG, AND THERE HAS BEEN AN IMPORTANT ELEMENT AMONG SINGAPORE CHINESE, ESPECIALLY THE OLDER GENERATION, WHO ARE INCLINED TO IDENTIFY WITH CHINA EVEN THOUGH NOT WITH ITS COMMUNIST GOVERNMENT. ANY SIGNS OF A SPECIAL SINGAPOREAN AFFINITY WITH CHINA, ON THE OTHER HAND, WOULD CREATE ALARM IN MALAYSIA AND INDONESIA, COUNTRIES ON WHICH SINGAPORE'S WELLBEING DEPENDS. SINGAPORE'S CRACKDOWN ON CHINESE CHAUVINISM AND ITS POLICY OF STRICT RACIAL EQUALITY THUS SERVE THE ADDED PURPOSE OF SEEKING TO AVOID GIVING JAKARTA OR KUALA LUMPUR ANY REASON TO LOOK UPON SINGAPORE AS AN OUTPOST OF CHINA IN SOUTHEAST ASIA.

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FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0896

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 SINGAPORE 3673

6. IT HAS BEEN ARGUED THAT A MORE ACCEPTABLE WAY OF HANDLING THE PROBLEM WOULD BE TO ENACT SPECIAL LEGISLATION MAKING RACIAL INTOLERANCE A CRIME (AS MALAYSIA HAS DONE), WHICH WOULD PERMIT THE TRIAL OF THOSE CHARGED WITH THE OFFENSE RATHER THAN THEIR DETENTION WITHOUT TRIAL. THE SINGAPOREAN REBUTTAL TO THIS SUGGESTION IS THAT A HIGHLY PUBLICIZED PUBLIC TRIAL WOULD ITSELF INEVITABLY BECOME A SOURCE OF RACIAL TENSION. THEY ALSO MAKE THE POINT THAT THE ISD IS NOT AN ARBITRARY MEASURE IMPOSED BY THE GOVERNMENT BUT A LAW PASSED BY A DEMOCRATIC, FREELY ELECTED PARLIAMENT WHICH CONTAINS PROCEDURAL SAFEGUARDS (PRIOR APPROVAL OF THE HOME MINISTER, PERIODIC PRESIDENTIAL REVIEW OF CASES, ETC.) AGAINST ITS ARBITRARY USE.

7. THE ISSUE THUS IS A COMPLEX, SENSITIVE AND HIGHLY EMOTIONAL ONE. OUR FEAR IS THAT PUBLIC USG INTERVENTION INTO THE TUNG CASE THROUGH THE DEPARTMENT'S PROPOSED LETTER WOULD BE WIDELY MISUNDERSTOOD IN SINGAPORE, NOT ONLY BY THE GOVERNMENT BUT BY THOSE WHO STILL ADVOCATE A "RACIST" CHINESE-ORIENTED STATE; ALTHOUGH THEIR NUMBERS ARE DWINDLING, THEY

STILL REPRESENT A SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL FORCE. WE COULD EVEN
BE SEEN BY SOME ON BOTH SIDES AS TAKING SIDES AGAINST THE
GOVERNMENT AND IN FAVOR OF THE "CHAUVINISTS." THE GOVERNMENT
WOULD CONSIDER IT A BREACH OF FRIENDSHIP FOR US TO TAKE A
PUBLIC STANCE AGAINST IT IN THIS ISSUE. THE FACT THAT WE WERE
INTERVENING ONLY IN SUPPORT OF THE PRINCIPLE THAT THERE
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SHOULD BE NO DETENTION WITHOUT TRIAL WOULD BE LOST BOTH ON THE
GOVERNMENT AND ON THE PUBLIC AT LARGE. THE NET RESULT COULD
BE A PAUSE IN THE CURRENT TREND TOWARD LIBERALIZATION.

8. WHILE IT IS DIFFICULT TO SUGGEST LANGUAGE FOR A RESPONSE
WITHOUT KNOWING JUST WHAT MRS. TUNG'S LETTER SAYS, WE WOULD
THUS STRONGLY RECOMMEND A FAR MORE NONCOMMITTAL AND LESS
ASSERTIVE REPLY THAN THAT PROPOSED IN REFTEL.

9. WE WOULD BE PREPARED AT ANY TIME TO RAISE THE TUNG CASE
ONCE AGAIN WITH THE SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT IF THE DEPARTMENT
WISHES, EXPRESSING AGAIN OUR CONCERN OVER THE MATTER OF
DETENTION WITHOUT TRIAL. WE FEEL STRONGLY, HOWEVER, THAT THE
DEPARTMENT'S RESPONSE TO MRS. TUNG SHOULD MAKE NO MENTION OF
A POSSIBLE USG APPROACH. IT WOULD BE USED BY TUNG'S SUPPORTERS
TO CLAIM US SUPPORT FOR TUNG RATHER THAN CONCERN OVER HIS
DETENTION WITHOUT TRIAL; IT WOULD BE TAKEN BY THE SINGAPORE
GOVERNMENT AS A DIRECT AFFRONT; AND IT WOULD SET BACK RATHER
THAN ADVANCE THE VERY TRENDS WE WANT TO ENCOURAGE IN SINGAPORE.

10. WE WOULD APPRECIATE IT IF THE FINAL TEXT OF THE DEPART-
MENT'S RESPONSE TO MRS. TUNG COULD BE CABLED TO US BEFORE IT
IS SENT TO HER.
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